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ON PAGE 2-A

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Career Army intelligence officer calls Westmoreland's figures 'a lie'

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NEW YORK — Explaining, "I find this very difficult," a U.S. Army colonel sat a few feet from Gen. William C. Westmoreland yesterday and accused him of deliberately reporting dishonest estimates of enemy strength in Vietnam in 1967.

Westmoreland watched dispassionately as Col. Donald W. Blascak, who was a major assigned to the CIA's Vietnam section from 1966 to 1968, testified that Westmoreland's orders helped produce "a lie" and a "corrupt" estimate of enemy strength. Blascak testified for CBS in the trial of Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit against the network.

A 1982 CBS documentary reported, and Blascak repeated yesterday, that Westmoreland's command minimized enemy strength in a special report prepared for President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967. The broadcast said the command had altered and suppressed intelligence estimates to make it appear in the report that the war was being won.

Blascak was asked twice by CBS attorney David Boies who Blascak believed was responsible for what the colonel called "a carefully well-packaged lie" contained in that report, the Special National Intelligence Estimate, or SNIE.

"I do not relish the answer to this question," Blascak answered the first time. He replied the second time: "I find this very difficult."

Boies told him: "I know you do, sir, but I must ask the question."

Glancing at Westmoreland, Blascak said finally: "I felt Gen. Westmoreland had placed a ceiling on the figures and would not allow his analysts to raise the estimate higher than that figure."

That figure, Blascak said, was 300,000 enemy troops — the same number cited by the broadcast as the

ceiling imposed by Westmoreland on his own intelligence officers. That level "kept striking us in the face every time we tried to get better numbers," he said.

Blascak, who is now an intelligence officer stationed in West Germany, said he shared his views in 1967 with Samuel A. Adams, a former CIA analyst. Adams is a defendant in the trial along with CBS producer George Crile and correspondent Mike Wallace.

After he testified, Blascak grasped Westmoreland's arm at the rear of the courtroom and told him that his testimony was the most difficult thing he had ever done. The two men chatted amiably for a few moments.

Like several previous CBS witnesses, Blascak said the enemy's hamlet self-defense forces, or irregulars, planted mines and booby traps that caused considerable casualties. The broadcast accused Westmoreland of keeping the self-defense forces out of the SNIE as a "tactic" to artificially lower estimates of enemy strength.

Westmoreland has testified that the hamlet forces consisted of women, children and old men who posed no military threat. But Blascak testified that they had caused 30 to 50 percent of all U.S. casualties in Vietnam.

"They killed people," Blascak said, his voice rising. "They wounded people. They maimed people."

If the hamlet forces had not been so dangerous, he added, the U.S. would have never sent troops to Vietnam. Blascak, who has spent 25 years in military intelligence, said he believed in 1967 that the enemy totaled 500,000 to 600,000 people. The SNIE, prepared in November 1967 for Johnson and his senior advisors, put the enemy's total "military force" at 223,000 to 248,000.

Westmoreland has said the self-defense forces received no more

than a footnote mention in the SNIE because they posed no threat and could not be accurately counted. Blascak said, however, that data collected by Westmoreland's own intelligence officers strongly contradicted what he called the general's "inappropriate, dishonest position."

The SNIE was "just paper, and served a terribly disuseful function," Blascak said, because "it would be used to plot the future course of the war in Vietnam." He said the report was a "well-packaged sellout" because Westmoreland's command previously had been part of a "consensus that there was evidence that supported higher numbers."

Blascak praised Adams for "his integrity, his dedication, his zeal" in challenging Westmoreland's command. He also lauded the expertise of a previous CBS witness, former CIA Vietnam expert George Allen, saying Allen had spent "only slightly less time in Vietnam than Ho Chi Minh."

Under cross-examination, Westmoreland attorney David M. Dorsen reminded Blascak that Westmoreland's command had included the higher enemy estimates in charts presented at an August 1967 conference with the CIA. Blascak, his face reddening, replied: "What you're into here is the sliding of the numbers around within the ceiling of 300,000."

Throughout his testimony, Blascak was repeatedly warned by the trial judge, Pierre N. Leval, not to make blanket accusations or discuss other people's motives. In a conference out of the jury's earshot, Leval complained to Boies: "He has done it in spite of my instructions. He had done it about six times."